

VZCZCXYZ0019
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHTC #1339/01 1651529
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 141529Z JUN 06
FM AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6023
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2619
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 0182
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 001339

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/RPM, EUR/UBI, SA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/14/2016

TAGS: MARR PREL NATO AF NL

SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: DUTCH STAYING THE COURSE
DESPITE PARLIAMENT'S UNEASE

REF: THE HAGUE 1292

Classified By: CDA Chat Blakeman, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Parliamentary Foreign Affairs spokespersons questioned FM Bot and DM Bot June 13 on the status of the Dutch deployment to Uruzgan province during the first hearing on Afghanistan since Parliament overwhelmingly approved the mission in February. The hearing confirmed the Dutch deployment is on-track: spokespersons from the major parties accepted the need to fight the enemy prior to starting reconstruction efforts and reiterated strong support. Opposition parties offered no new arguments against the mission. Most criticism was directed at the GONL's failure to report heavy fighting last week to Parliament. Meanwhile, a new poll indicates that public support for the mission is growing. End summary.

Better Than Expected

¶2. (C) In an evening devoid of any real surprises, Dutch Parliamentary Foreign Affairs spokespersons questioned FM Bot and DM Kamp on the status of the Dutch deployment to Uruzgan province during a four-hour hearing on June 13. The hearing was the first since the Dutch Parliament overwhelmingly supported the deployment on February 2. (Note: An earlier hearing in mid-May had been postponed due to an urgent debate on Ayaan Hirsi Ali's nationality status.)

¶3. (C) Spokespersons from the major parties that initially supported the deployment -- CDA, VVD, and the main opposition party Labor (PvdA) -- accepted the GONL's explanation that Dutch troops will be required to fight the Taliban prior to starting reconstruction efforts, and reiterated their support for the mission. Even D-66 spokesperson Bert Bakker, who opposed the mission, expressed strong support for Dutch troops "fighting on the ground" in Afghanistan. VVD spokesperson Hans van Baalen called for a "straight back and a strong stomach." Supportive parliamentarians also criticized recent comments made by D-66 Cabinet member Pechtold suggesting the Cabinet re-examine the deployment decision given the challenging security situation (reftel). Bakker attacked his own party colleague, noting that the Cabinet should "speak with one mind." PvdA spokesperson Bert Koenders went so far as to describe the deployment as a "stabilization mission," and called Pechtold's remarks "dangerous and irresponsible."

¶4. (C) Opponents -- led by Green Left and Socialist

spokespersons Karimi and van Bommel -- repeated previous arguments regarding whether a reconstruction mission could be effective and successful given the deteriorating security situation. Kamp rejected the "artificial distinction" between a combat and a peacekeeping mission. He and FM Bot stressed that the GONL had expected heavy resistance and was prepared to fight, and that the reconstruction aspect of the mission was still possible. FM Bot acknowledged that reconstruction efforts may only start by the end of the two-year deployment. Other parliamentary concerns voiced included de-listing Uruzgan Governor Monib from the 1267 sanctions list and detainee issues.

¶15. (C) Most criticism of the GONL was directed at recent press statements made by Dutch Col. Morsink, who reported that Dutch forces had killed "dozens" of Taliban during heavy fighting last week. Parliamentarians were outraged to learn of the fighting through the press and argued it should have been reported in a letter to Parliament by DM Kamp on June 9.

They pressed for "more openness" regarding the mission. Kamp explained that the information reported by COL Morsink was "not verifiable"; he therefore chose not to report it to Parliament. Kamp also expressed concerns for the safety of Dutch forces, and defended restrictions placed on reporters to remain at bases. This prompted a discussion among Parliamentarians regarding freedom of the press. Kamp denied censorship, but noted the safety of Dutch forces was his first priority.

¶16. (C) MFA Uruzgan Task Force Coordinator Pieter-Jan Kleiweg described the hearing as "better than expected". He said that the GONL had not expected any serious problems, but that FM Bot and DM Kamp were well-prepared to answer parliamentarians' concerns. He added that the major party

spokespersons had "acted responsibly," especially PvdA spokesperson Koenders, who did not "fall victim" to attacks from the left and stressed the Labor Party's support for the mission.

¶17. (C) Prior to the hearing, MFA Deputy Director General for Political Affairs Pieter de Gooijer told POLCOUNS that Koenders was under pressure from the left wing of the PvdA to attack the deployment decision, but that both Koenders and PvdA leader Wouter Bos had made clear they had no desire to reopen the issue. De Gooijer anticipated, however, that the PvdA would continue to press the government to maintain a "red line" between OEF and ISAF and on the treatment of detainees, and would also push for greater information sharing with parliament. On the last point, de Gooijer expressed frustration with Col. Morsink's comments to the press, and noted that the MOD and MFA were still trying to work out modalities for dealing with journalists in the field -- an area in which he suggested the U.S. military might be able to offer some useful advice. DAO contacts also have expressed interest in such assistance.

Third Party Transfers

¶18. (C) FM Bot also announced during the hearing that the GONL had received guarantees from Afghan authorities that prisoners detained by Dutch troops would not be transferred without GONL consent. (Note: The Dutch press erroneously reported FM Bot as having said detainees would "not end up at Guantanamo Bay." End note.) Parliamentarians were pleased with this development. MFA's Kleiweg explained to polmilooff June 13 that the GONL had revised its MOU with Afghan authorities along the lines of the UK MOU by including a clause concerning third party transfer approval. He said that the GONL hopes the NATO exchange of letters will include a clause on third party transfers. But in the meantime, he said the Dutch will rely on their newly revised MOU.

Bounce in Support of Mission

¶19. (C) A poll conducted by the survey firm TNS NIPO shows an

increase in support by the Dutch public in support of the deployment. According to the results of the poll, 40 percent now support the mission, up from 27 percent in December 2005.

The poll suggested that the increase in support may reflect the recent fighting Dutch forces have experienced in Uruzgan.

BLAKEMAN